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ABSTRACT

This critical review of the speeches, journal articles, and books written by community college presidents examines themes, styles, and information sources, and attempts to define standards by which the presidents' writings could be judged. The first section indicates that community college presidents are as prolific as any other group of two-year college writers; that they write not only for their peers, but for a wide cross section of educators; and that they often continue to write about community colleges even after they have left the field. The second section describes the various types of publications in which materials written by presidents are found, ranging from community college journals, ERIC documents, and speeches to full-length books. Tracing the most frequently covered topics in presidential writings, the next section indicates that while coping with change and fiscal matters have been recurring themes, most of the literature focuses on issues of immediate concern, such as declining enrollments and collective bargaining. While acknowledging variation in the writing styles of presidents, the next section offers generalizations about their predominantly positive and uncritical tone, their lack of empirical data, and their use of jargon, technical language, and journalistic phrases. Next, a section on information sources indicates that most writings focus on the presidents' own experiences and their own colleges, relying little on outside literature. The final section assesses the presidential literature on the basis of its factuality, objectivity, relevance, and practicality; and offers general conclusions about the least and most valuable writings. (JMC)

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CRITICAL COMMENTS ON THE LITERATURE WRITTEN BY PRESIDENTS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES.

COURSE

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

PROFESSOR

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
1. THE AUTHORS AND THE AUDIENCE	2
2. THE PUBLICATIONS	3
3. GENERALISATIONS AND THE CONTENTS	4
4. THEIR STYLE	6
5. THE SOURCES	8
6. CRITICAL STANDARDS	9
BIBLIOGRAPHY	11

INTRODUCTION

The paper will look at literature written by the presidents of Community Colleges. (C.C.S). Whist there are limits to the extensiveness of the literature surveyed, efforts will be made to sample a wide range of authors from those in small rural colleges to those in large urban colleges. The many different types of publications will also be investigated; speeches, journals, periodicals, books.

The contents of the literature will be investigated to see if there are common themes and generalisations that presidents write about. This should also reveal the width of subjects on which they write and expose areas which appear to be of little interest to them. The style of their writings will also be looked at.

The sources for their writings will be surveyed; where they go to for information and ideas.Consideration will be given to both the range and depth of these sources.

Finally, an attempt will be made to define standards by which the literature of presidents could be judged. These standards could be applied from several viewpoints, including typicality, practicality, relevance and objectivity.

1. THE AUTHORS AND THE AUDIENCE

Community College presidents write as prolifically as any other group of individuals who are connected with C.C's. In fact some see it as a necessary part of the job; " One of the most effective means of keeping in touch with one's field is to contribute to that field through professional presentations, through writings of a professional nature suitable for publication and through taking a stand on issues " (G. Vaughan 1989) That they read these publications, or at least the ones to which they submit articles is an implicit assumption borne out in letters to the editor which can praise the layout of their article and also correct the figures shown (R. Melone 1985). However it is not only for their peers that they write; their audience is likely to be a very wide cross section of " educational society" from those involved directly in the C.C.'s as deans, reseach officers and faculty, to those on the outside who look in such as professors of various social science disciplines and of education at other Higher Education establishments, those in federal and state research centres, and even the presidents spouse.
Some literature is directed towards a specific part of the audience; " Advice for those who would be president " (G. Vaughan 1989) is aimed at those who aspire such as deans of instruction while "The Agony of Change " (L.Koltai 1980) is for a wider audience.

Presidents continue to write about C.C.'s even after they retire or move on to greater things. This may mark their concern for the survival of the C.C.'s (A. Thurston 1983) or may be a reflection of the respect in which they are held.

2. THE PUBLICATIONS

Articles written by presidents are found in all types of publications. There is a large variation in both the length of the article and how it is published, and there may be a correlation between the two.

Presidents contribute many articles to the journals of C.C.'s and Higher Education as well as directly to ERIC. Non-commissioned articles tend to be submitted to the smaller journals which are published by the Universities such as " Community College Review" publi hed by North Carolina State University or the "Community Junior College " published by Virginia Commonwealth University and North Texas State University, although they do also submit articles to to the publications of the AACJC such as " Community and Junior College Journal " (CJCJ). However in the latter, articles are often commissioned such as the CJCJ series on small rural colleges in volume 52 no. 2 or the series on ' Can community colleges offer opportunity and excellence " in the Community, Technical and Junior College Journal (CTJCJ) in volume 56 no 2. This is not surprising as the editorial board of these journals may contain many college presidents; in 1981, the board of the Community College review listed 4 presidents among its 15 members.

This trait is carried even further with the periodical " New Directions for Community Colleges " (ND f CC) which has many articles written by presidents. Each issue has a commissioning editor and if that person is a C.C. president, then that issue is likely to contain a greater number of articles written by other presidents. Issue no 48 edited by R. Kopecek and R. Clarke has 5 of its 8 articles written by presidents and issue no 46 also edited by a president has 6 out of 11 articles by fellow presidents. In contrast issue no35, edited by a non-president, M. Mehallis, has no articles written by presidents.

ERIC also commissions articles by presidents which appear in a number of publications; as additional artciles in journals such as " Change ", as topical papers or as Junior College Resource Reviews.

Presidents give many speeches at conventions and seminars and these are often preserved and form the basis for articles. These may be found only as documents in ERIC or more rarely they can be published with the approval of the Office of Education of the US department of Health. Education and Welfare.

All of these articles written for journals, as papers or as speeches are not extensive pieces of literature. In journals such as the CJCJ articles are typically 1500 to 2000 words long while in ND f CC they can range from 2000 to 5000 words. Speeches are usually about 4000 published words. Topical papers although longer, are still only 10,000 words.

The final source of presidential writing is very different. A few presidents write books; obviously these are much longer and differ in their purpose and origin although they too are directed at a wide spectrum as their audience.

3. GENERALISATIONS AND THE CONTENTS

Presidents write on almost every issue that could involve a C.C.; although there are three major themes which recur; coping with change, fiscal matters and a current topic of concern such as declining enrollment.

The concern with change is apparent is many articles written by presidents. That change is inevitable is assumed and most authors believe it is unlikely to directly benefit the C.C. Thus causes for change are idenified and methods for coping with change are suggested. Some refer to remedies used in their own institutions; W. Campion (1985) discusses how he managed to change the boundaries of the college district, while others give advice on possible options, thus R. Richardson (1972) suggests recruitment, retrenchment, revision or reform as possible options for dealing with enrollment decline. Others such as J. Lombardi (1974) look toward the next 10 years to see directions for future chenge.

Fiscal matters are a major concern of all presidents, whose job after all , is partially dependant on a healthy bank balance. The concern is always over the lack of funds and how to adapt to it or compensate for it. Thus R. Temple (1986) discusses how to identify and eliminate weak programs while R. Breuder (1985) discusses ways of involving businesses in the budget. The theme of financial hardship is one of the most enduring aspects of presidential writings and there are few articles that do not refer to fiscal matters in some way or another.

When commissioned as editors or authors, the chosen topic is usually one of immediate concern to the C.C.'s and the nature of these topics has changed over time. Thus in the early 1970's, the issues were specifically related to students; C. Blocker wrote in 1969 about student unrest and again in 1974 on 'Humanizing student services ' while L. Koltai (1974) wrote about reaching out to the non-traditional student. In the latter part of the 1970's, the issues had changed to governance, finance and trustees; J Lombardi (1979) wrote on collective bargaining and trustees while L. Koltai (1978, 1979) wrote on financial management and Proposition 13. The emphasis in the early 1980's has transferred to a more industrial approach with major concerns of involving local businesses and technology (D. Bryant 1984) and the nature of the curriculum and general education (J. Eaton 1982) Thus the presidents writings were reflecting the general outside concerns about the role of the C.C.'s in vocational education and in preparing students for the world of work. The latter part of the 1980's have tended to bring a new concern; stressing the need for coping changes in the student body and to reassure the community of the worth of C.C.'s: Thus discussions range from declining enrollment (R. McCabe 1989) to commitment to excellence (R. Shaw 1989), marketing the college (E. Leach 1989) and dealing with immigrants (A. Birenbaum 1986)

Other themes that emerge regularly are the need for planning and to continually up date the mission and goals of the college. As these are basic needs of any institution or business, it is not surprising that they are reiterated. However the president often uses this opportunity to put forward his own personal character as a man of ' vision ' and also to deride others as lacking in both foresight and the willingness to change. The recipiants of this distrust can vary from the local high school for failing to educate their students prior to their transfer to the C.C., to faculty for failure to up-date their courses or even to the trustees , referring to them as ' naive and in need of education " (C. Blocker 1969).

Although presidents write on many aspects of the C.C., individuals often have favoured themes about which they assume or are assumed to have expertise. This does not mean that the individual will not consider a wide diversity of issues; in fact most presidential literature is characterized by the large number of issues touched upon, yet there is usually one specific topic on which that president writes more frequently. For J. Lombardi the theme is financial affairs (1972, 1974) ; for G. Vaughan it is administration and the role of the president (1981, 1986, 1989); for L. Koltai it is coping with change (1974, 1978; 1979, 1980). These attributes are also reinforced when certain presidents are asked to be the commissioning editors, for the journals.

The diversity of topics discussed by presidents is huge. They can range from a short historical account of the oldest college in Georgia (L. Alderman 1985) to the account of computer and technical innovation (C. Branch & S. Hoppe 1985) although such technical information is usually supplied by a faculty member who appears as a co-author. Job training can be discussed with reference to the steel industry (P. Day 1984) as can the role of women in C.C.'s (J. Eaton 1981).

Some presidents continue to write about C.C,'s after they have left. These articles exhibit a similar range of topics although the preoccupation with finance is missing. It seems that that concern ends with the release from financial accountability. Thus the work of these authors tends to have a broader and more open perspective on the C.C.'s and often looks at areas of national concern. Thus they have a more objective view from this distance and write on such topics as " Opportunity for all " and " Developing and maintaining governance " (J Gollattscheik 1985, 1988).

The few books that have been written by presidents also reflect the wide interests, and include such topics as " The role of the President and his spouse " (G. Vaughan 1989)

The areas of the C.C.'s that presidents do not write about are fewer and can be easily identified. Details of the curriculum, methods of delivery and institutional research are not discussed and perhaps are rightly considered as outside their role. However the lack of discussion of the philosophy of education and the virtue of academic study is more surprising and is perhaps indicative of their perception of the role of the president as "chief executive officer of an educational business " and not as " the spiritual leader of an educational community "

4. THEIR STYLE

Presidents are in the forefront of publicity for C.C.'s; much of what they say or write is liable to be repeated by others; they also value their job. Thus a positive approach to all issues is a vital part of their role; criticism of a C.C. is rare however constructive that might be. This approach has led to a specific attitude that permeates through their writings; how ever tough the job might be, and it is certainly made out to be ' mission impossible' on occassions, the C.C,'s and in particular the president will cope, battling through the jungle of diminishing funds, falling enrollment and increasing accountability to not only survive but to excel. Thus many of the articles serve not only to glorify the writer but also to bolster the confidence of others and to reaffirm their self worth. (J. Lombardi 1980)

Many presidents wish to appear as practial men, capable of decisive actions and not air dreamers or theoreticans. This is reflected in the titles of their articles." Getting started - Straightforward advice " (J. Lukenbull & R. McCabe 1982) tells of how careful planning is needed when launching a new general education program. The articles frequently offer advice and alternatives sometimes in a patronising manner. G. Vaughan (1981) tells his audience that "the debate over whether the administrative process should promote shared authority is passé ".

However the articles do usually provide a clear picture of the topic by using a system of points, to guide the reader through the argument and to focus the mind on the existence of a range of alternatives or steps in the process.

The style of the articles can vary. Some, usually those which started out as speeches, are very personal and often flamboyant. They can be rather ambiguous at times and contradictory too. Others write impersonally yet still do not refer to the works or ideas of others so it is still largely a subjective view. A few presidents especially when writing books or longer papers, do use a more objective approach. J Lombardi (1972) when discussing financial crisis in the C.C, considers a wide range of viewpoints and quotes from surveys and reports.

Many articles are lacking in empirical data and contain few figures other than dates. This is reflected in the very limited use of tables or diagrams in their articles. E. Leach (1989) uses a series of four diagrams to explain the relationship between students needs and college personel but this is a very atypical example.

Literary styles do vary but generally presidents like to appear knowledgable and so all the articles are littered with jargon, technical language and journalistic phrases. Collective bargaining and the campus has been referred to as " the unconsummated marriage " (G. Vaughan 1981) and R. Brueder (1985) discusses a " 5 VC Cincinnati Milacron Vertical Milling Machine."

Presidents also seem to have a love of trite phrases and mottos that must be shared with their readers. Thus Warren Bennis' dictum that " leaders must have a high tolerance of ambiguity " is quoted by G. Vaughan (1981) and J. Higbee (1980) quotes his motto as " Do Something - Even if it's Wrong."

Presidents also wish to appear up to date and so recent events on and off the campus and the latest figures are referred to. Thus L. Koltai (1978) discusses not only Proposition 8 as well as 13 but quotes the results of an L.A. Times poll.

5. THE SOURCES

Most literature written by presidents does not have an extensive bibliography if it has one at all. This is not an oversight on their part as many are writing their own perspective on events, quoting their own experiences and relaying results from their own college. The few acknowledged sources they give are often reports published within their own college, newspapers and frequently their own previously published thoughts. Thus G. Vaughan (1981) quotes three references; his own college documents, one published book and his own previously published paper.

The longer articles and especially those commissioned for journals and as topical papers, tend to include statistics gained from the National Center for Education Statistics and results from commissions such as the Carnegie Commission or State bodies.

Other sources used by presidents include doctoral dissertations, articles from other journals, (commonly other issues of the one for which they are writing the article) quotes from books often written by other presidents or by professors of education. News reports whether from papers or the television are also a common source. A few presidents quote from discussion or information received from local businesses and employers, especially when discussing the needs for vocational training.

As with all other aspects of the literature of presidents, there is a great diversity of practice and the same president will not always quote many references. Within the journals, there is similar diversity of practice. L. Koltai quotes 24 references for a short article in Junior College Resource Review (1980) yet none for his published speech (1984). C. Blocker has a bibliography of 17 sources for a speech (1969) yet only 7 for an article in New Directions for Community Colleges (1974). J. Eaton in New Directions quotes 4 references, two of which are personal communications.

Although many of their ideas are self generated, presidents rarely have the time to carry out research and surveys; thus most of their comments are their own viewpoint and are largely unsubstantiated. However a rare exception is G. Vaughan whose book (1989) on the role of Presidents and their spouse includes extensive research.

6. CRITICAL STANDARDS

The dominant theme to energe from this review is the diversity of the literature written by presidents

Most presidents appear men of the world, confident and on top of their job with time to write short articles regularly on a wide variety of the issues that are relevant to the C.C.'s.
Others act as scholars publishing longer articles, often unsubstantiated.
A few are true scholars giving clear, referenced factual and objective accounts in books as well as contributing long and short articles to a wide variety of journals.

A typical article written by a president would exhibit many of the following characteristics. It would be relatively short, a maximun of 5,000 words and would cover a variety of issues especially finance and change as well as the actual stated theme of the article. It would contain causes, remedies, and advice for a variety of concerns mixed in with anecdotes and jargon. It would be based mainly on the authors own experience and observations at his college with few if any references to other institutions or authors. It is unlikely to contain figures or have information given i tabular format. It will always look at the positve steps being made by the C.C.'s and never find fault with their actions. It will be highly subjective expressing a personal view, sometimes in an emotive way.

However being typical is not the only or necessarily the most useful of standpoints to use to measure the literature.

Is it factual ?
Most presidents are writing about their own experiences and in that respect they are relaying the facts as they see them, although this may well be a very biased view of them.Very few articles use statistics or are strictly factual. The greatest amount of factual information given is either from their own college reports or from a recent news report.

Is it objective ?
Presidents usually report on an issue as they see it and their articles can be emotive and full of value judgements which lack definition. Very few look objectively at the information and assess it independently. Most articles tend to to be a subjective comment on how the factual details of the issue relate to their own environment as they perceive it. Much of the literature relates to their own pracice and does not discuss whether other strategies could have been and does not seek to evaluate what actually occurred. Very little criticism occurs of either the C.C.'s in general or of any specific action taken in them. This severely undermines the credability of many of them and leaves the reader wondering as to whether the whole picture has been given.

Is it relevant ?
One key attribute of president's literature is its topicality. The issues discussed are always the burning ones of the day and the ones perceived by other presidents to be posing the greatest threat to the C.C.'s at that time. Presidents see their role as identifying these threats and sharing their concern and expertise with others. In this respect , their writings are always relevant to the audience as it does mirror the problems that many of them face too. However it does not always stand the test of time well; issues of great relevance in the early 1970's are no longer contentious today.

Yet with the recurrent themes of financial pressure and coping with change, much of it will be relevant for a long time to come.

Is it practical ?

Much of the literature tends to give advice or suggest possible paths of action. In this respect the audience may gain new perspectives and solutions to a problem and come away with useful ideas. However not all the literature is such and much could be considered to focus too much on the causes of the problems and apportioning blame rather than offering constructive help for the future.

Judgement of the literature can thereby be made by applying these standards to it.

The least valuable literature

The least valuable articles are very introspective and contain subjective personal views based solely on their own college. Although it may focus on change, it looks backward to the glorious past and bemoans the future. Many issues are touched upon but there is never an in-depth treatment of the major theme of the article. It would have few factual references and provide limited and vague ideas on how to cope with change. Although this may be typical, it has been of little use to the reader who goes away without having learnt anything new or having been given new perspectives on an old issue.

The most valuable literature

The most valuable articles have objective authors who use their own experiences and observations to back up ideas and results they have gained from others. Their work will be carefully referenced and will contain facts and figures. Others would be able to go to their sources and find more details if they wished. Although a wide choice of topics exists, it will focus on one only and not only give causes but suggest a variety of alternative routes and solutions which are related to their own or to others experiences. Thus these works, and they do exist, would provide practical assistence to the reader in dealing with similar problems in their own institutions.
The best presidential writings are factual, objective,relevant and practical.

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KEY TO JOURNALS

C.J.C.J.	Community and Junior College Journal
C.J.C.	Community Junior College
C.T.J.C.J.	Community, Technical and Junior College Journal
C.C.R.	Community College Review
J.C.R.R.	Junior College Resource Review
S.A.C.J.T.C.	Southern Association of Community, Junior and Technical Colleges.
A.A.C.J.C.	American Association of Community and Junior Colleges.
N.D. for C.C.	New Directions for Community Colleges

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